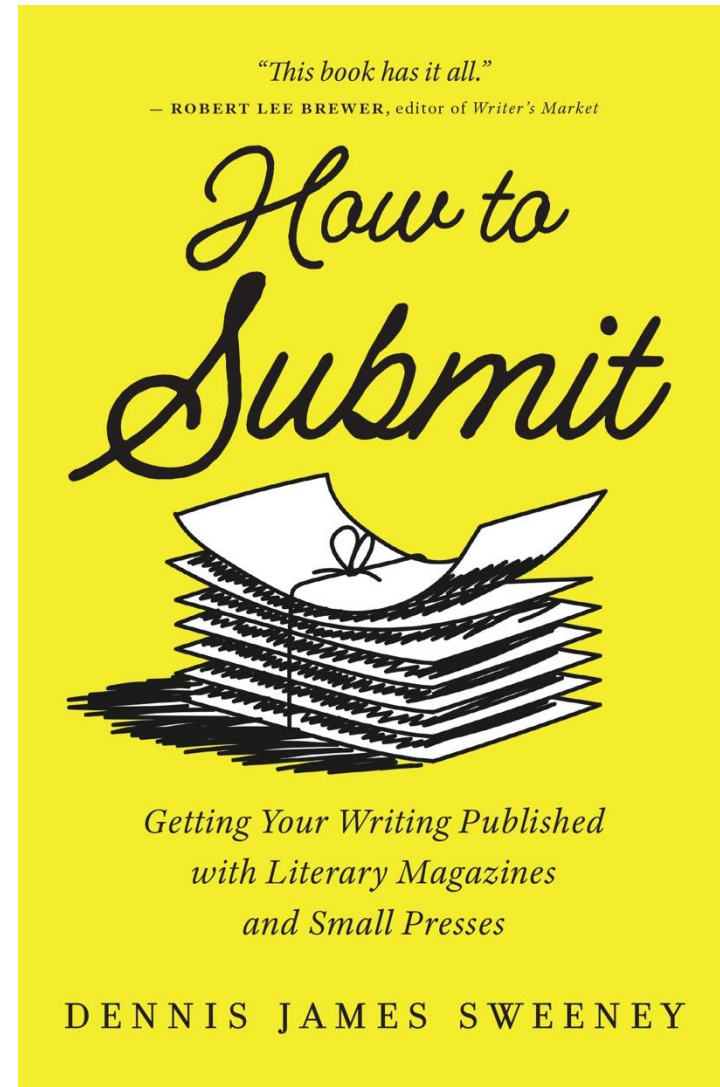


How to Get Published—And Love Doing It

A guide to finding
the joy in your
submitting & querying

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Dennis James Sweeney with **Authors Publish**



1. Build an authentic connection to the people and places where you'll submit.

Because the relationships account for much of the joy of writing and publishing.

Ranked Lists (Literary Magazines)

Ranked lists organize venues based on prestige. The two most reliable, regularly updated lists are:

- [Clifford Garstang's lists](#) based on which venues are awarded Pushcart Prizes.
- [Erika Krouse's list](#), which is for fiction specifically. This list also includes a lot of helpful information about each of the journals including deadlines, payment, and word count.

For a different perspective, you can try John Fox's blog [BookFox](#), Brecht De Poortere's [new rankings](#), and Eric Schwitzgebel's ranking of sci-fi and fantasy magazines on [The Splintered Mind](#).

Ranked Lists (Small Presses)

Small presses don't have a clear system for rankings. But there are ways to get a sense of their standing in the literary world.

- [CLMP Firecracker Awards](#)
- [NEA Grants to Publishers](#)
- Book Reviews in publications like [Rain Taxi](#), [Full Stop](#), and [The Rumpus](#)
- Other awards like [Lambda Literary Awards](#) and regional book awards

Rankings, honors, and awards only count as much as you let them. How important is prestige to you?

Unranked Lists (Literary Magazines and Small Presses)

These lists include a wider array of publications and leave judging them up to you. For convenience, focus on lists with tags and an organizational system.

- [Duotrope](#). Duotrope is a longstanding, comprehensive database with information on almost all active magazines and presses, including genre, style, word count, and payment, as well as response times. A subscription costs \$5 a month.
- [Chill Subs](#). Chill Subs is like a free, Gen Z Duotrope (although some features have recently been monetized).
- [Writer's Market](#). *Writer's Market* is the well-known, regularly updated print guide to nearly every submission venue, including book publishers, literary magazines, trade magazines, literary agencies, and contests.
- [Poets & Writers](#). *Poets & Writers* maintains expansive databases of literary magazines, small presses, and literary contests and awards.
- [CLMP's Directory of Publishers](#). The Community of Literary Magazines and Presses has a list of member presses and magazines.
- [Heavy Feather Review's](#) Where to Submit list is a regularly updated listing of small presses and journals that are open for submissions.

Ranked and Unranked Lists (Literary Agents)

There are several lists and databases that will help you narrow down your search for a literary agent:

- [Publisher's Marketplace](#) (\$25/month) is the gold standard. While it isn't exactly a submission resource, it provides a detailed, updated account of all agented book deals in the United States. You can organize these deals by agent, genre, and keyword. Rough "rankings" are also included for each category of book.
- [Manuscript Wishlist](#) has a searchable database of literary agents accepting submissions, sometimes including a personalized wish list that goes beyond the details included on Publisher's Marketplace.
- [QueryTracker](#) includes notes from users on recent responses to their queries.
- [Writer's Market](#), [Duotrope](#), and [Poets & Writers](#) include lists of literary agents alongside their information about literary magazines and independent publishers.

Build an Authentic Connection

The more you participate in the literary world, the better idea you'll have of where in that world you want to make your literary home.

Get involved **as a reader:**

- Read online literary magazines, subscribe to print literary magazines, and buy books from a diversity of presses and represented by a variety of agents.
- Attend local and online reading series.
- Research authors you like, their agents, and their publishing histories.
- Pay attention to the publishing circumstances of the writing you read.
- Use publishers and magazines to guide your reading.

Build an Authentic Connection

- **Contribute** to the literary community.
 - Write book reviews.
 - Volunteer for a literary magazine or small press.
 - Start or help with a reading series.
 - Participate in writing groups, workshops, and classes.
- **Connect** online and in person.
 - Get on Instagram, X, Facebook, or TikTok.
 - Visit bookstores associated with small presses, like [Deep Vellum](#), [Two Dollar Radio](#), and [Lithic Press](#).
 - Attend literary festivals and conferences near you.

2. Emphasize connection in your cover letter or query letter.

Because everyone wants to connect—including editors and agents.

Cover Letter Template

Dear **Full Names of Editors,**

Thank you very much for considering this **number of words**-word **short story, essay, or set of poems**, **"Title."**
Personal note or clarifying comment if I have one.

I am the author, most recently, of *The Rolodex Happenings* (Stillhouse Press, 2024), a novella in performance art Happenings. I am also the author of *You're the Woods Too* (Essay Press, 2023) and *In the Antarctic Circle* (Autumn House Press, 2021), which won the Autumn House Rising Writer Prize. My writing has appeared in *Ecotone*, *The New York Times*, and *The Southern Review*, among others. I have an MFA from Oregon State University and a PhD from the University of Denver. Originally from Cincinnati, I live in Amherst, Massachusetts, where I teach at Amherst College.

Thank you again for your consideration.

All best,
Dennis James Sweeney

*Note: A word count is not needed when submitting poetry. For multiple poems, list each title.

¶1: Salutation

Most personal, shows you did your research:

Dear **Full Name of Editor**,

Dear **First Name of Editor**,

If you can't find the names of the genre editors:

Dear Nonfiction Editors,

Dear Poetry Editors,

Dear Fiction Editors,

¶2: Introductory Paragraph

Positive Rejection? Make sure this is in the first line of your cover letter.

- *Example:* Thank you very much for your encouraging words on the last submission I sent.
- *Example:* Thank you for your kind comments on my last two submissions and your invitation to submit again.

Connection? A personal relationship to the publication or invitation to submit.

- *Example:* I appreciated getting to meet you this spring and am grateful for your invitation to submit.
- *Example:* I am a former contributor from issue **number**, and I thought this new essay might also be right for your pages.

¶2: Introductory Paragraph

The logistics. Give the basic details of the piece. This information should be in every cover letter.

- *Title:* Put the title in quotation marks.
- *Genre:* Say whether you are submitting a short story, essay, or poems. If you are sending multiple shorter pieces, such as poems or flash fiction, let them know how many you are sending.
- *Word Count:* Round to the next 100 words.
- *Example:* Thank you very much for considering “Title,” a number of words-word short story, essay, or set of poems.
- *Example:* I am writing to submit four poems, “Title 1,” “Title 2,” “Title 3,” and “Title 3.”

¶2: Introductory Paragraph

Your (or your writing's) relationship to the publication. The first paragraph is also an opportunity to mention qualities of the publication that motivated you to submit. You can also mention upcoming themed issues that are relevant to your piece.

- *Example:* I am submitting this to you in particular because of your magazine's focus on **subject**. This essay is particularly interested in **subject of the piece and how it relates**.
- *Example:* As a longtime subscriber, I thought this might be a good fit for your consistent mix of **descriptor of the writing they publish** and **another descriptor of the writing they publish writing**.
- *Example:* I thought these poems might be a fit for your **theme** issue, since they revolve around **subject that is related to theme**.

¶2: Introductory Paragraph

Background. Give context for the piece of writing you are submitting. This can be helpful when you want editors to understand your depth of engagement with the subject matter or personal relationship to the material.

- *Example:* This short story, essay, or set of poems is part of my collection in progress, “Title,” which describe the short story collection.
- *Example:* These poems grow out of my time in place, where I lived recently while what you were doing in that place, including fellowships, research, work, etc.

¶2: Introductory Paragraph

If I have nothing extra to say, one line is plenty:

Thank you very much for considering this **number of words**-word **short story, essay, or set of poems**, **“Title.”**

If you have received a personalized, encouraging rejection in the past:

Thank you very much for your encouraging notes on the **short story, essay, or poems** I sent in **rough time of the year you sent it**, and for encouraging me to submit again. I am submitting here a **number of words**-word **short story, essay, or set of poems**, **“Title.”**

¶3: Bio

If you have no publications:

- I live in **place**, where I work as a **job**. This would be my first published **short story, essay, or poem**.

If you have a few publications:

- My **fiction/nonfiction/poetry** has appeared in **lit mag** and **lit mag**. I live in **place**, where I work as a **job**.

If you have several publications and a couple fellowships or residencies, along with additional involvement in the literary community:

- My **fiction/nonfiction/poetry** has appeared in **lit mag**, **lit mag**, and **lit mag**, among others, and has been supported by **fellowship, residency, or foundation** and **fellowship, residency, or foundation**. I live in **place**, where I run the reading series **name**.

If you have a book, several publications, an MFA, and editorial positions or other forms of literary involvement:

- I am the author of **Title**. My **fiction/nonfiction/poetry** has also appeared in **lit mag**, **lit mag**, **lit mag**, and **lit mag**, among others. I am an Editor for **lit mag**, and I currently run a local writing organization, **name**. I received my MFA from **school** and currently live in **place**.

¶4: Sign-off

The sign-off paragraph isn't strictly necessary. For me, this paragraph is an opportunity to express my gratitude to the editors for reading.

- *Example:* Thank you for considering “Title.”
- *Example:* Thank you again for considering “Title.” I look forward to hearing from you.
- *Example (if you know the editors):* Thank you for your consideration, and I hope you're doing well.

¶5: Valediction

Keep it simple:

All best,

Your Full Name

Sincerely,

Your Full Name

If You're Submitting to a Small Press

Tips for expanding the small press cover letter:

- A short description of your book and how it intertwines with the publisher's catalog and mission
 - Word count, genre, and title
 - Going beyond these basic details to connect to the press's mission: emphasize plot, form, or audience depending on where you are submitting
- Your personal relationship to the press
 - Is there a book from the press that has been influential to you as a writer? Do they have a mission that is important to you? What do you admire about the press and their catalog? What made you want to submit this specific book to them?
 - If you have only done light research on that press in preparation for submitting, it's better to say less

If You're Submitting to a Small Press

Tips for expanding the small press cover letter:

- Take a tone that reflects the press itself
 - A chapbook micro-press might appreciate a cover letter that is personal, DIY, and not too pitchy
 - A press whose mission addresses a specific community might be interested in your and your writing's relationship to that community
 - A large indie press might expect a cover letter that is more like a query letter, in which you emphasize the saleable qualities of your book alongside a bio with your most impressive achievements
- Your cover letter builds a connection

My Query Letter for *How to Submit*

Dear Reiko Davis,

I'm seeking representation for HOW TO SUBMIT: PUBLISHING YOUR WRITING WITH SMALL PRESSES AND LITERARY MAGAZINES, a guide for writers that will be 50,000 words when completed. I thought this book might be a fit because of your work with Alan Gelb's craft books, in addition to your sales to small presses as well as the large houses.

Most publishing guides focus on the process of querying, finding an agent, and publishing a book with a Big 5 publishing house. HOW TO SUBMIT: PUBLISHING YOUR WRITING WITH SMALL PRESSES AND LITERARY MAGAZINES is the first book to take seriously the process of sending out your writing to small presses and literary magazines. It fills an essential need among those writers who choose a path to publication that is writer-led, community-based, and especially accessible to those who wish to see their writing in the world.

Along with its practical advice about the submissions process, HOW TO SUBMIT is a guide to for finding community in the literary landscape. Arguing that submission and publication should *give* us energy, not take energy from us, HOW TO SUBMIT is perfect for writers of short stories, essays, and poems, as well as those with a full-length book, who are seeking a place for their work that really feels like home.

I am a small press author and decade-long member of the literary community, especially in my seven-year run as Small Press Editor of *Entropy*, where I built the "Where to Submit" list into the popular resource it became. I am the author of THE ROLODEX HAPPENINGS (Stillhouse Press, 2024), YOU'RE THE WOODS TOO (Essay Press, 2023), IN THE ANTARCTIC CIRCLE (Autumn House Press, 2021), and GHOST/HOME: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BEING HAUNTED (Ricochet Editions, 2020). My writing has appeared in numerous other venues, including small lit mags like *elimae*, *Juked*, and Roxane Gay's *PANK* as well as established venues like *Ecotone*, *The Southern Review*, and *The New York Times*. I received my MFA at Oregon State University and my PhD at University of Denver. I live in Amherst, MA, where I teach at Amherst College. I also teach at GrubStreet in Boston, where my signature course is "How to Submit: Publishing Your Writing with Literary Magazines and Small Presses."

I would be happy to send the full proposal, including three sample chapters, at your request. My email address is _____ and my phone is _____.

Thanks so much for your consideration,
Dennis James Sweeney

3. Create an energizing space for your work toward publication.

Make the process a welcoming home for yourself.

Document 1: Active Submissions

Include **title**, **venue**, **date** of submission, and **response**.

Choose a system:

- Based on a template, like this one on [Matt Bell's website](#) or this one from [Shannan Mann on Authors Publish](#).
- A submission tracker, like those provided by [Duotrope](#) and [Chill Subs](#).
- Develop your own system in a spreadsheet or document.

Keep it lively and allow it a personal touch.

Here are a few different editors' descriptions of how they track their submissions at the [Cincinnati Review blog](#).

Document 2: Aspirations and Possibilities

Include several sections (or separate documents):

- a) Literary magazines and presses **where you would like to submit**.
- b) Upcoming **deadlines** and reading periods.
- c) Literary magazines that have sent you **positive rejections**.
- d) General **notes** or journal entries about your submission strategy.

Organize this information in ways that feel intuitive (and fun) to you.

Document 3: Cover Letter Template

No need to re-invent the wheel every time you write a cover letter!

Build an Energizing Offline Space and Schedule

- Submitting party with friends
- Drink tea, light a candle, say a short prayer or devotion in the name of your writing
- Compartmentalize your time, so the experience isn't scattered
- Journal about your submitting process, just like you'd journal about your writing process

4. Let the process of waiting (and hearing back) fuel your writing.

Go with the energy instead of against it.

Let the Nervous Energy Help You Instead of Undoing You

- Write in a new genre
- What haven't you explored yet? What muscles haven't you used?
- Alternatively, throw yourself into research about publishing contexts
- Or pause your writing and focus on building yourself back up energetically
- Constantly checking Submittable won't help 😊
- Enjoy the waiting: the sense of possibility, the idea that something is out there for you

Rejections Are an Opportunity to Reevaluate

- Is this writing something you really believe in? That you would submit 20, 50, 100 times and keep revising the whole way?
- Or is it something you can easily let go of?
- We all produce some writing that we really care about, and other writing that we *think* we really care about but that fades with time. Let rejection be a catalyst for your thought process around what matters to you, allowing you to focus on the writing you believe in and truly want to share.

Don't Wait for Acceptance to Join the Conversation

The more you participate in the literary world, the better idea you'll have of where in that world you want to make your literary home.

Get involved **as a reader**:

- Read online literary magazines, subscribe to print literary magazines, and buy books from a diversity of presses and represented by a variety of agents.
- Attend local and online reading series.
- Research authors you like, their agents, and their publishing histories.
- Pay attention to the publishing circumstances of the writing you read.
- Use publishers and magazines to guide your reading.

Don't Wait for Acceptance to Join the Conversation

- **Contribute** to the literary community.
 - Write book reviews.
 - Volunteer for a literary magazine or small press.
 - Start or help with a reading series.
 - Participate in writing groups, workshops, and classes.
- **Connect** online and in person.
 - Get on Instagram, X, Facebook, or TikTok.
 - Visit bookstores associated with small presses, like [Deep Vellum](#), [Two Dollar Radio](#), and [Lithic Press](#).
 - Attend literary festivals and conferences near you.

5. After acceptance,
don't stress. Enjoy the
details and the deluge.

The work of publishing isn't the same as writing,
but it can still be creative and inspiring.

The Process of Publication Is Filled with Connection: Enjoy It

- Editing can be stressful, but remind yourself of others' investment in your writing and develop relationships through the work
- Promoting your writing can be all-consuming, but think of it as part of the creative process: crafting a message in the world
- As you experience the reception to your published writing, think *quality* not *quantity*—depth not breadth
- “Career” isn’t the right word for our experiences as published writers. I think a better word is “life.”

Questions to Keep Asking Yourself

Just in case you find yourself afloat.

Is this process of seeking publication going to inspire me?

Is my submitting/querying practice going to feed my writing and my creativity?

Is my journey toward publication going to make me feel like the writer I want to be, regardless of how long acceptance takes?

Additional Resources

It's essential to find support for your submitting.

Further Reading and Advice

- [Tony Tulathimutte's guide to submitting your writing at Catapult](#) is another view on much of what I've discussed today, including information on how to write a pitch letter for a piece of nonfiction.
- [Lincoln Michel's guide to getting published in literary magazines a BuzzFeed](#) is an insightful look at both the writer's side of things and what goes on behind the scenes at lit mags and journals.
- Samuel Moss's [Introduction to Submitting your Manuscript to Presses](#) at 11:11 Press contains down-to-earth advice about how to send out a full book to small presses.
- Kim Liao's ["Why You Should Aim for 100 Rejections a Year"](#) has become a shared reference point for many writers who are looking to keep themselves accountable to their submitting practice.
- [Jane Friedman's website](#) is an essential resource for those seeking to publish with the Big 5.
- You can also find regular articles on writing and publishing in venues like [Poets & Writers](#), Chill Subs' [Write or Die magazine](#), [Lit Hub](#), and [Electric Literature](#).

Continuing Support and Community

- **Community writing workshops** (like this one!)
- **Annual conferences** like [AWP](#) and [NonfictionNOW](#)
- **Literary organizations** for specific communities of writers such as [Canto Mundo](#), [Cave Canem](#), [Lambda Literary](#), and [Zoeglossia](#)
- **Regional book festivals** like the [Boston Book Festival](#) and [Portland Book Festival](#)
- **Annual workshops** like [Bread Loaf](#), [Tin House](#), and [Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation \(VONA\)](#)
- Groups that are specifically devoted to **submitting** like [Women Who Submit](#)

How to Submit is available now.

You can order a copy on [Bookshop](#), [Amazon](#), or from your local bookseller.

In the meantime, stay in touch—and find more resources for writers and submitters—by subscribing to my free newsletter, [Write What You Want](#).

